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John G. Fether

IN TENEBRIS LUX

A Sermon

*PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH
OF CHRIST IN OXFORD*

ON THE

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1900

BY

EDWARD

LORD BISHOP OF ROCHESTER

HONORARY STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH

PRINTED BY REQUEST

HELEN BEATRICE PAGET

BORN

February 22, 1858

DIED

November 22, 1900

with love

from E.R.

IN TENEBRIS LUX

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'Clouds and darkness are round about Him : righteousness and judgement are the habitation of His seat.'—Ps. xevii. 2.

So spoke the man of old time, summing up in a sentence the faith of his day.

His thoughts of God were in a paradox : he knew and he did not know. His eye as he looked upward met impenetrable cloud : yet he dared to say, for he felt that he knew, what the cloud concealed. He endured, seeing Him who was invisible.

In so speaking he was simply true. He kept to his facts. He did not let one half of them belie the other. His understanding looked out upon this wonderful world, this immeasurable and unimaginable system of things in which he lived, as we do ; upon the lesser world within the world, the life of man, so familiar yet so baffling, so intelligible in the way that right upon the whole brings its own reward, and wrong its own hurt and ruin, and yet so utterly perplexing in its changes and chances of fortune ; and he knew that he could not understand what was the heart, the centre, the meaning of all this mystery and of Him who made it. 'Clouds

and darkness are round about Him.' 'Thy paths are in the great waters: and Thy footsteps are not known.' But he had another faculty in him, which spoke as clearly as his understanding, and with as much command. His conscience told him that right was right, that it had in it and behind it infinite power. He heard through it the Voice divine and eternal, and he confessed and denied not, but confessed 'Righteousness and judgement are the habitation of His seat.' Righteousness, not a pale abstract fairness, but a living, burning, moving force, at work everywhere, holding all things in its hand, very awful, with a fire of judgement in it against evil—'the earth saw it and was afraid;' and yet a blessed thing, a sure help, a strength and shield for all who trusted and obeyed. Sion heard of it and rejoiced.

Such was his twofold faith. It was not an easy one. It could not be always the same. It had its times of darkness or eclipse. Its believer looked out sometimes on the world about him, took the measure of his own little science, and was afraid: 'Lo, these are parts of His ways:—but the thunder of His power who can understand?' And sometimes the trouble came closer home; 'it came upon him and he fainted,' it 'touched him and he was troubled.' The weary weight of all this unintelligible world bore in with some sudden pressure upon

himself. And with that the inner light might seem to withdraw itself: the God of his trust seemed to fail him. Things were too much for him. He longed for some assurance, some vision. 'Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! . . . I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him.' He was brought to cry, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' Yet the faith held on, and emerged, and shone, for in it was the strength of God.

What is our case? The same, and not the same. Not the same, for 'the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.' He has come who has shown us the Father, has declared to us His name. The God so long believed in has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of His own glory in the face of Jesus Christ. To a world which sat in darkness and the shadow of death, light, the light of life, has sprung up. Conscience has met its answer, and death has yielded to the purer glory of the resurrection. The righteousness and judgement of the Psalmist's faith have, as it were, opened out to us its inner heart, and we know that God is love. Thankless indeed we are if we ever forget the difference so made.

‘Not the same,’ ‘and yet the same.’ Not—let us mark it well—that there is a place for love, but that love is the power which pervades and controls the whole, bending all things to His will. The clouds and darkness are not gone: the mystery is still about Him, and His ways past finding out. We have indeed seen the Father, if we know our Lord: with open face those that are His reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord; and yet, the Apostle who wrote those words himself acknowledges, ‘we see in a mirror, darkly,’ in a riddle. Doubtless this is right, as it is natural and inevitable. For we are men as they were. One discipline suits us all. It could not be that they should walk by faith, and we by sight.

It is right and it is necessary. Human faculties are as unable as ever they were to understand all the ways of God, to see as He sees. For us faith has been given clearer light and surer ground, to make it, doubtless, capable of more, to strengthen it perhaps for even harder trial. But faith is still the occasion of man’s great opportunity; it still calls for splendid ventures: it is still tried and sifted to see of what metal and sort it is.

The heroes of faith in the Old Testament are brought up in the New as our examples, and by faith we walk, as Abraham and Moses and the prophets walked, expecting, desiring, trusting. We

know and we do not know : we have to bear the clouds and darkness, though the love revealed shines in our hearts.

Brethren, I have thought that I might rightly remind you of all this to-day, when one thought fills every heart. I do not seem to-day, in Christ Church, as a Christ Church man to Christ Church men, to be addressing a public congregation, but rather to be speaking to a family and household in grief. You had been so drawn together by the quiet spell of gracious influence that now the sorrow at the centre of your common life is felt, I believe, with real and aching pain throughout it by seniors and juniors, residents and non-residents, the servants as well as the members of the House. Such heightening and quickening of college feeling is a rare thing ; but it is true here, and it is eloquent of its own cause. And out of the sincerity of that grief and sympathy there springs—is it not so?—the sad, perplexed thought, the almost angry, bitter question, To what purpose is this waste ? Does God care ? It is best to deal quietly and firmly with such thoughts, to remind ourselves that there is, indeed, in them no reason or truth. They really demand that the ways of God should be clear at every step to the wit of us, the atom-creatures of His hand, and we know and own that to ask this is only foolish. The clouds and darkness must be

there. His ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. How beautifully Dante says it in words which I had chanced, as we say, to read last Thursday morning:—

The power of vision that our world receives,
As eye into the ocean penetrates,
Which, though it sees the bottom near the shore,
Upon the deep perceives it not, and yet
'Tis there, but it is hidden by the depth.

'Tis there,' that is the point. Faith, but not blind faith. We know the habitation of His seat. At the centre of His ways and thoughts is in fullness and perfection inconceivable the power of that which we know as love. That is the witness of Christ and of the Cross, and from its very depths the faith of our conscience echoes to its truth. The power of the dark hours for those that love God is to make that truth more luminous by the very darkness. May it be so with many of you at this time. It will be so, I believe, in the lives which suffer most to-day, and to which we long so vainly to offer comfort. It is only a few years ago that some of us saw the quiet intrepidity with which she who has now gone from us faced the imminent prospect, as it then seemed, of a widowed life. A like example will, by God's grace, be set in this fiercer and longer trial. For to those that trust there springs up light in the darkness. He feeds them in the time of dearth. Let none of us,

then, who are to-day in the outer courts of this holy place of Christian sorrow linger only among grieving—much less bitter—thoughts. Rather let us gather up with quiet thankfulness the blessings (there is no other kind so true) which God has once more given in a Christian's life. The best that is in each of us lives by and is wrought out of the best that we have seen and known, and comes to us ministered, as it were, by certain figures, who live in our memory, and to whom, in times of difficulty, or trouble, or sin, our thoughts instinctively turn. They are our best stand-by. They reassure us, and give us hope; they give us quiet rebuke, but they inspire us, too; they call us back, and call us on. They are our witnesses of what life may be. Their power over us is the strongest and gentlest that there is. Am I wrong in thinking that in the heart of many a House-man for many a year one of the forces that will make for purity, and tenderness, and simple conscientiousness of daily living, and self-forgetfulness for others' sake will be the uneffaced picture of her who was indeed the lady of the House during their undergraduate days? The memory of a life with the dignity and freedom of entire simplicity, with something in it still of the brightness of a girl, but enlarged by the tenderness of mother and wife to take in every gladness or sorrow of others' lives.

They will remember, perhaps, the atmosphere of a presence into which nothing unclean, or unworthy, or ungenerous could dare to come; though everything that was natural and fair found ready welcome, and each was taken at his best. Something at least of what is sought by those who fashion for themselves the worship of the Madonna may come to us surely in closer and more wholesome fashion through lives such as this, the last example to us of—

A creature not too bright and good
For human nature's daily food,
And yet a spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light.

I could say more, and you will remember more, of quiet daily duty done at a constant cost of strain and toil; of the determined, almost desperate, effort to leave no lives within this place outside the circle of courtesy and friendship; of the constant care and friendship towards those who, as the world speaks, were beneath her in station—the servants of the House and their families; of the eagerness of heart with which she followed the war, felt for those who suffered, sent her letters of bright sympathy to House-men at the front; worked at the head of what Oxford did for the wives and children of its soldiers. But we pass to-day behind all this. She hath done what she could, and she is at rest. We pass, as the very spirit of her

example bids us do, to that which was the essence of it all. The God who gave her by nature her fair and womanly gifts gave her by grace the power to refine and consecrate them. It came through truth early learnt from the lips, and life, and character of a father to whom Oxford and the Church of this century owe an incalculable debt; it was disciplined by quiet and persevering devotion; it was seen in humility such as Christ alone can give; it radiated the power of that love which amid the clouds and darkness of this life finds in the lives and characters of His own its steady and irrefutable witness. Let us be imitators of them, as they also were of Christ.

In Memoriam¹.

THE last week has been indeed a sad one for Oxford, and, in a very special degree, for Christ Church. The story is piteously short. On November 16 we heard that Mrs. Paget was laid up with a chill. Though she did not overcome it as quickly as we might have hoped, there was no thought of grave anxiety. But on Tuesday alarming symptoms developed, and, though there was real hope on Wednesday evening and Thursday morning, that these had abated under treatment, they recurred; and the end came peacefully on Thursday afternoon at half-past five.

The position held by the wife of the Dean of Christ Church partakes, naturally, of the extensive variety which belongs to the position of the Dean. The Dean has a diocesan and civic aspect, which often tends to be lost under the shadow of his work as head of a great College. Mrs. Paget—apart from the popularity she had already won as one of the ‘Christ Church ladies’—inherited when she came

¹ Reprinted, by permission, from *The Guardian*, Nov. 28, 1900.

to the Deanery a tradition in which both aspects of the Dean's position had weight—a tradition of public spirit in regard to charitable works and the like in the city, and of kindly interest in all that concerned Christ Church and its members. In both areas of work she was signally successful. The medical charities in the city, the University Mission at Calcutta, the Christ Church branch of the Mothers' Union, the Christ Church Mission in East London, all have cause to remember her name with deep and true gratitude. The last year brought upon Mrs. Paget, as upon so many, new public duties. She took a vivid interest in the war, and was prominent among those who undertook the care of the reservists' wives. Her last appearances before her illness were at a concert held in Christ Church Hall on behalf of the Calcutta Mission, and at a party given by her to the Christ Church branch of the Mothers' Union.

But the part of her work which, I am sure, lay nearest to her heart was that which was concerned with the members of Christ Church, especially the undergraduate members. In this it is no exaggeration to say that her skill amounted to genius. A large College is necessarily a difficult place to manage. The men come from very various schools and homes, and have ideas and associations of the most miscellaneous kind. Mrs. Paget found the way

to make all of them her friends. She had been but a short time at the Deanery when one found that men spoke of going there, either by invitation or to call, with a special degree of satisfaction. Gradually the practice grew up of going to the Deanery at tea-time on Sunday afternoons. Men crowded in, and Mrs. Paget greeted them all with a welcome the sincerity of which the shyest and most diffident man could not mistake. Nothing stood in the way of these meetings except illness. Often those who went found themselves in the presence of some highly distinguished guests, staying at Christ Church for the Sunday. But the attention due to these never succeeded in spoiling the unembarrassed friendliness of the reception of which every undergraduate was sure.

So it is that her death—sudden and premature as it seems—comes upon each and all of us as a personal loss; there is no one who does not feel that he has lost a friend. This loss is irreparable.

This was the note struck with convincing clearness at the funeral on Monday afternoon. Members of the House gathered round her grave as members of one great family. The coffin was borne by eight of the junior members of the House:—J. M. Thompson, E. de G. Lucas, scholars; E. K. Talbot, B.A., R. E. More (president of the Junior Common Room), W. R. B. Riddell, J. B. Aspinall, Viscount Helmsley,

and R. L. Charteris, commoners. The Lesson was read by Dr. Ince, and then the whole House followed through Dr. Moberly's garden to the little graveyard at the south-east corner of the cathedral. There we laid her body to rest.

The work done by Mrs. Paget in her short time at the Deanery is not of the kind that needs to await the verdict of posterity; those who have been nearest it, know it best. It has been and will be felt through every part of the great College over which she reigned so winningly and so graciously. The effect of it is permanent, 'far in the spiritual city.'

THOMAS B. STRONG.

¹ 'THE loss recently sustained by Oxford.' This is the phrase of the Musical Club, eloquent in its simplicity and reticence, a sorrow which it rather feels than names.

Born and bred in the noblest traditions of the Church of England, sharing all the choice inheritance of the family of the late Dean of St. Paul's, Mrs. Paget has been personally known in Oxford

¹ Reprinted, by permission, from *The Oxford Magazine*, Nov. 28, 1900.

for fifteen years, the larger half of them spent in the Deanery of Christ Church. She threw herself with all her heart into the duty of entertaining others—from the highest to the humblest; and, so filling a great position with transparent sincerity of purpose, found, in the very unreserve of service, its own healthy gladness of spirit. The whole community knew her brightness in entertaining. Hundreds of undergraduates enjoyed the lively kindness of her tea-table. Yet few, perhaps, knew how deeply her heart was engaged in the effort which appeared as mere brightness. Nor was this true only of College life. She took her part in visiting the wives of the reservists from Oxford. She had her own correspondents among those who had gone from Christ Church to the front. She was keen to keep touch of interest, if possible, with them all. She maintained her correspondence with others also (a rarer effort!) who had gone to the front in a more exacting service—the members of the Oxford Mission to Calcutta. She threw her heart into her welcome, year by year, of the Whit Monday visitors from ‘St. Frideswide’s’ in Poplar. Few things were nearer to her heart than the meetings, religious and social, of the ‘mothers’ connected, in different ways, with Christ Church. Through these meetings, again, she worked for those at the

front—whether South African soldiers or Calcutta missionaries. The entertainment of the ‘mothers’ was the last overt act of her life. These are but glimpses of fact, and they touch only what is public and open. There is a deeper reserve upon which we do not intrude. But it is plain that the Musical Club did not exaggerate. Oxford—a *very* wide Oxford—is in mourning.

R. C. MOBERLY.

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